



## **N.C. Commercial Tobacco-Free Tribes** **Waccamaw Siouan Youth: Leading the Way to a Tobacco-Free Tribe**

**Summary:** Using varied funds and a strong interest in health, the Waccamaw Youth Circle of the Waccamaw Siouan Tribe keeps its buildings and grounds free from the use of commercial tobacco.

**Challenge:** Many health issues challenge tribal people everywhere, including here in North Carolina. The use of commercial tobacco is one of these challenges, as 26.2% of North Carolina tribal people report being current smokers, compared with 17.9% of the general population (NC BRFSS 2016). Cigarette smoking increases their risk for cancer, lung diseases, heart disease, diabetes and other health problems. Members of the Waccamaw Siouan Tribe formerly grew commercial tobacco, with community members sharing the work involved, from bedding and setting the plants to cropping and later packing the leaf for sale. Competing health issues and their community relationship with tobacco make commercial tobacco prevention a difficult challenge.

**Solution:** Over more than a decade, the youth organization of the Waccamaw Siouan Tribe, called the Waccamaw Youth Circle, has educated adult tribe members on the hazards of commercial tobacco use and the need to protect others – especially children – from secondhand smoke. According to Leslie Jones, a Tribe Member and the Tribal Enrollment Officer, generations of the Waccamaw Siouan Tribe have followed the tradition of using sacred tobacco as gifts and as part of spiritual ceremony. With commercial tobacco prevention funding through the N.C. Commission of Indian Affairs, the Waccamaw Youth Circle began more than a decade ago reminding their fellow tribe members about these differences, and teaching others about the health hazards of commercial tobacco use.

The Waccamaw Youth Circle has helped support their tribal powwows by creating T-shirts to sell, which include the tribe's name on the front and health messages of the back. The T-shirts have been popular with youth and adults, helping raise funds. While most T-shirt designs included tobacco messages, some included messages about other health issues. T-shirt funds allow the Waccamaw Youth Circle to support the Powwow Committee, including sponsoring the teen dance competition, for ages 13-17. During this segment of the competition the emcee reads tobacco-free messages, sponsored by the youth.

The Youth Circle approached tribal leadership years ago asking for the tribal buildings and grounds – including the powwow grounds – to be commercial tobacco free. Since the tribal council took action, the powwow grounds are blessed with sacred tobacco in the opening ceremony, and after that no commercial tobacco is allowed on those grounds. An area for commercial tobacco use is provided out of site of the powwow activities. This policy has been in place since 2006, with signs provided by another grant.

### Quote

*"They are kids; it's coming from them. When you have a youth group that's coming to you with this information, the adults are willing to listen." Leslie Jones, Waccamaw Siouan Tribe*



*Waccamaw Siouan Powwow  
Photos on this page provided by  
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**Results:** Tobacco-free policies promoted by the Waccamaw Youth Circle continue to keep tribal buildings, grounds, and powwow grounds free of commercial tobacco use. Tribal members who have participated in commercial tobacco prevention activities, including taking tobacco-free pledges, are less likely to use commercial tobacco later in life.

## Lessons Learned:

- Let young people take the lead. In the Waccamaw Siouan culture, children’s well-being is very important. When young people ask for protection from secondhand smoke, adults listen.
- Seek different funding streams. As we all know, funding comes and goes. Looking for new sources of funding or raising funds locally can help.
- Combine culture and health. Developing T-shirts and other messages that include the name of the tribe along with health promotion messages gets a lot of support and attention from youth and adults alike.
- Ask people to take a tobacco-free pledge. It might seem like a low-level intervention, but to a people who stand on their word, making a pledge is not a small thing.

## Contact Information:

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To learn more about smoke-free and tobacco-free policies in N.C., visit [www.tobaccopreventionandcontrol.ncdohhs.gov](http://www.tobaccopreventionandcontrol.ncdohhs.gov)



*Examples of powwow t-shirt designs and Tribal Grounds signage (bottom right)*



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